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Files Show Kurt Waldheim Served Under War Criminal

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VIENNA, March 3 — Kurt Waldheim, former Secretary General of the United Nations, was attached to a German Army command in World War II that fought brutal campaigns against Yugoslav partisans and engaged in mass deportations of Greek Jews, according to official documents made available here.

The documents also show that, as a young man, he was enrolled in two Nazi Party organizations.

The documents, which were obtained by The New York Times, were found among German military records and in the archives of the Austrian Justice Ministry and the Foreign Ministry. Austria was part of Nazi Germany from the Anschluss, or union, of 1938, to the end of World War II.

Autobiography Skips Period

In authorized biographies and in a recent autobiography, Mr. Waldheim does not discuss his activities during the years involved, 1942 and 1943.

Mr. Waldheim, who headed the United Nations Secretariat from 1972 to 1982, acknowledged in an interview Sunday that he had served in the units in question. But he said he had played a minor role and knew of no war crimes or atrocities ascribed to the units.

In the interview, he said it was the first time that he had heard of mass deportations of Greek Jews from Salonika.

Mr. Waldheim is running for the presidency of Austria. The election is scheduled for May 5, and Mr. Waldheim, in recent polls, has had a slight edge over his Socialist opponent, Kurt Steyrer.

He accused his opponents of using the information about the war years to damage him politically.

"The timing of it is perfect," he said. "For 40 years these things have rested."

Mr. Waldheim belittled his membership in the Nazi groups, saying that his activities were intended to shield him and his family, who were known as opponents of the Nazis.

Some of the allegations against Mr.

Waldheim, attributed to a wartime document, were published here today in Profil, a news magazine. Other documents, about his military service, were made available to The Times by the World Jewish Congress and were corroborated independently by The Times.

There have been past charges that he had had Nazi associations. Mr. Waldheim has said on each occasion that he never was a member of a Nazi organization or a Nazi-affiliated organization.

The documents show that in July 1942, after a campaign against Yugoslav partisans, Mr. Waldheim was awarded a high military decoration of the Nazi puppet state of Croatia, the Order of the Crown of King Zvonimir.

The Croatian state was known for persecuting Jews, Serbs and gypsies through deportations, forced labor and mass murders. A former Cabinet minister of that state, Andrija Artukovic, was recently extradited by the United States to Yugoslavia to stand trial on war crimes charges.

Little Known of His Activities

Political commentators say that despite the documentary evidence of Mr. Waldheim's official positions in 1942-43, little is known of his activities, and that the most serious accusation against him may ultimately turn out to be that he was not forthcoming about his past.

The disclosures are nevertheless awkward because of his assertions over the years — when he was questioned, particularly by Jewish groups — that he never had anything to do with Nazi-affiliated organizations.

In 1981, a group of American Jews told him that the United Nations risked losing public support in the United States because of a series of anti-Israeli resolutions under his stewardship.

The recent disclosures also raised the question whether, at the United Nations or earlier as Austrian Foreign Minister, Mr. Waldheim had been susceptible to pressure from the Soviet Union or other countries if they knew of his past activities.

Given an opportunity to comment on the disclosures, Mr. Waldheim denied that he had ever been subjected to political pressure or blackmail.

According to the records made available to The Times, Mr. Waldheim, as a 20-year-old student at the Consular Academy here, was enrolled April 1, 1938, in the Nazi student union, about three weeks after the Anschluss. The following Nov. 18, he was enrolled in a mounted unit of the Sturmabteilung, or SA, the paramilitary Nazi organization known as the Brownshirts. He remained a member until he entered military service on Aug. 15, 1939.

Mr. Waldheim said he became aware after the war that he had been enrolled in the SA, but that he had not considered himself, at the time, a member of that organization or of the Nazi student union. The two groups, he said, had been established by "one or two students" and were used for "social gatherings, coffee parties and things like that."

He said the students had a choice among sports of tennis, horseback riding and motorcycle racing. He chose riding, he said, never assuming that this would lead to enrollment in the SA.

Sought to Protect Family

He said his basic motive for taking part in the gatherings was to shield himself and his family from political harassment, a common enough motive at the time.

Indeed, Mr. Waldheim's personnel file in the Austrian Justice Ministry quotes a character reference written in 1940 by a gauleiter, a Nazi party official, revealing lingering distrust. The official described Mr. Waldheim's father, Walter, a schoolteacher until the Nazis stripped him of his job, as a follower of Kurt Schuschnigg, the Austrian leader who opposed the Anschluss, and said that the son "through his braggadocio gave proof of his antipathy toward our movement."

The official added that the younger Mr. Waldheim had "proved himself" through military service, eliminating doubt of his qualification for Government service.

Mr. Waldheim, in discussing joining the student group at the Consular Academy, said in the interview:

"I did not the want to refuse because I thought that is harmless, it is not political involvement. Naturally, it was important for me. If I ever had the idea of finishing my studies, I had to have some protection."

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